PLAYSTATION 3

SONY

# THE EDGE GUIDE TO PS3

SONY
SELECT   START

# THE THIRD PLACE

S ometimes the clearest indicators of a company's standing can be found by looking at the activities of its competitors. Using this process, it's not difficult to see that Microsoft's recent TV ad tagline of 'Next generation gaming is here' isn't so much a proud statement of fact as it is the action of a company that is running scared. Clearly, it is a reaction to Sony's infamous battle cry – 'The next generation starts only when we say it does' – but a truly confident company would ignore Sony's proclamations and focus instead on making headway while it had the next-gen market to itself.

Microsoft's lack of confidence is in contrast to the face it presents in public. At E3 this year it pronounced that it would reach ten million Xbox 360 sales before Sony had sold even one of its new consoles, giving it what some misguided commentators said would be 'an unassailable lead'. Now Microsoft no longer has the next-gen market to itself, PlayStation 3 is on sale, and analyst estimates put Xbox 360's worldwide installed base at 4.6m. It has also been claimed that Xbox 360 is selling at a slower rate than Xbox was at the same point in its lifecycle.

Xbox 360's HD-DVD drive, cooked up in quick time to give the platform more parity with Sony's approach, the token gestures towards more family-friendly game content, and the strategic unveiling of the first hard *Halo 3* details timed specifically to throw a spanner into the works of Sony's launch, will not bring about a dramatic change in Microsoft's fortunes.

There's no question that the PlayStation 3 birthing process has been difficult for Sony, sometimes almost comedically so, but the console is now in a few hundred thousand users' hands, and there are millions more who want one, too. In this supplement we take a closer look at some of the reasons why, despite Sony's worst efforts, demand for this console, not Xbox 360, remains so high.

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# THE PS3 GAME PLAN

## SONY'S CONSOLE IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER, BUT HOW, EXACTLY, DOES IT DIFFERENTIATE ITSELF?

Look beyond the shimmering black curves, beyond the tens of thousands of polygons churning and oozing across the display in rock-solid 1080p, and listen. Hear that? Listen harder. The noise that almost isn't there is the sound of a device that has been built to sit right at the centre of the living room, to serve as the true hub of the so-called digital lifestyle. Today's living-room devices aren't supposed to chug and wheeze, and PS3 has been built to be entirely non-intrusive. Microsoft's machine, by comparison, behaves like… well, like a machine.

On the face of it, it may not seem like an important point of differentiation, but it serves to illustrate the lack of finesse in Microsoft's design, and mark out Xbox 360 as a piece of technology that is still firmly in the game-console category, however much non-game functionality

cycled through five of this XMB iteration's options to get there. (Contrast this with Wii, which places game functionality at the top left – the start point – of its opening Wii Channels menu.)

**It's in photo-viewing** mode that the crispness of Sony's vision for PS3 further hits home. Sucking data from an external memory source or its hard drive, the console allows you to flick through photos as you'd expect, providing the opportunity to zoom or rotate images, but then a secondary slideshow mode can also be selected. This transports your view to a dazzlingly laboratory-white surface upon which your photos are dynamically scattered in a continuous line as if being dropped into view by an offscreen hand. Each rendered and lit in realtime 3D, some are traditional full-bleed photos; some have Polaroid-

## The PlayStation 3 user experience is more detached than Xbox 360, almost clinical

continues to be lumped on around its edges.

The Xbox 360 frontend's garish greens and oranges are further signposts that confirm its residency within the candy-coloured valleys of Videogame Land. The PlayStation 3 user experience, in comparison, is more detached, much less visually friendly, almost clinical, a further refinement of the XMB (cross media bar) interface first used in Sony's PSX and more recently in PSPs and high-end Bravia TVs. Nothing about it says gaming. To access games, in fact, requires you to click along to the right, having

style borders; occasionally a group of negatives (accurately rendered, of course, as if they were real negatives of your photos) will drop into the series. Date stamps taken from the images' data, meanwhile, are presented alongside in a soft, written-by-hand-with-a-pencil font. This mode has nothing to do with gaming (although you could store screenshots here), it won't be of much interest to people who fill their spare time writing *Halo* fan fiction, and it's not especially practical if you urgently need to see just how well that beach sunset came out, but it is bewitchingly elegant and perfectly in tune with what PS3 represents – that is, the most sophisticated all-purpose media delivery you've ever seen.

This all-purposeness obviously encapsulates audio playback, the XMB depicting your music as on PSP's equivalent. Choose a track (using typical support, such as MP3, AAC, etc) and you can enter the built-in audiovisualiser. This aspect, too, throws up contrasts between Microsoft's and Sony's solutions, PS3's visual feedback appearing as gentle, ambient blobs and clusters where Xbox 360's does its stuff in more angular, psychedelic territory. (Interestingly, soon after launch Sony will offer two further, differently styled audiovisualisers via download, for a charge. If popular, no doubt these will be followed by more.)

The video option, meanwhile, shows off another aspect of PS3's frontend that will be overlooked in the grand scheme of things but which, in its application, further demonstrates the kind of deep thinking that has gone into PS3's design. Rather than appearing as mere filenames or static images representing the file, PS3's Cell is used to decode multiple 1080p HD streams in real

**Sony Computer Entertainment president Ken Kutaragi holds aloft a prototype PS3 at the hardware's E3 '05 debut showing**
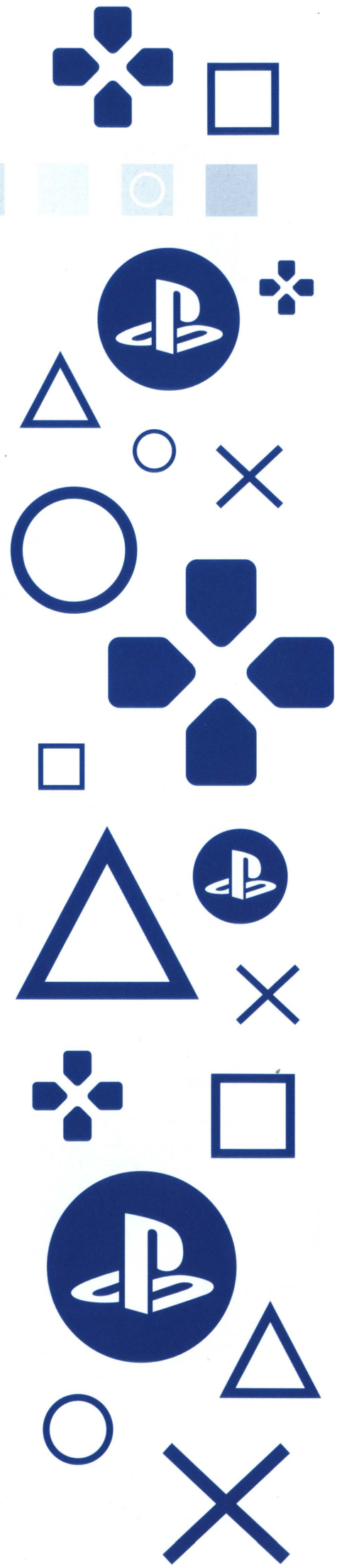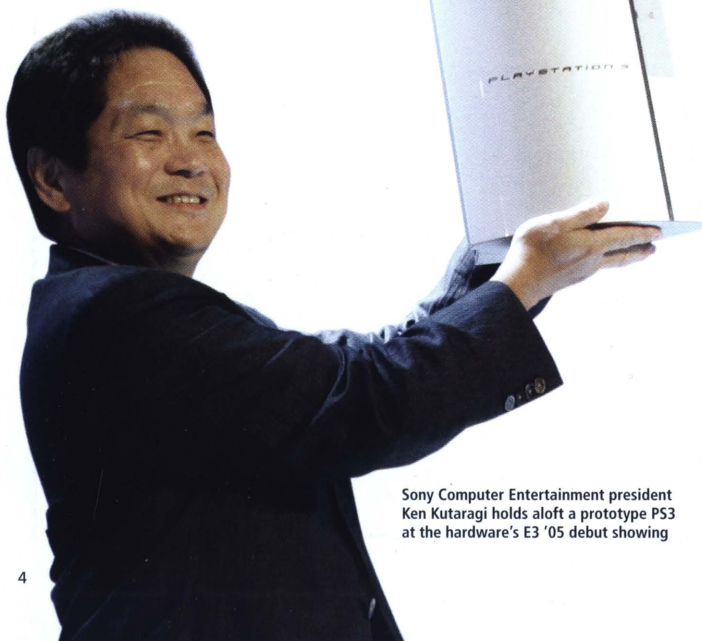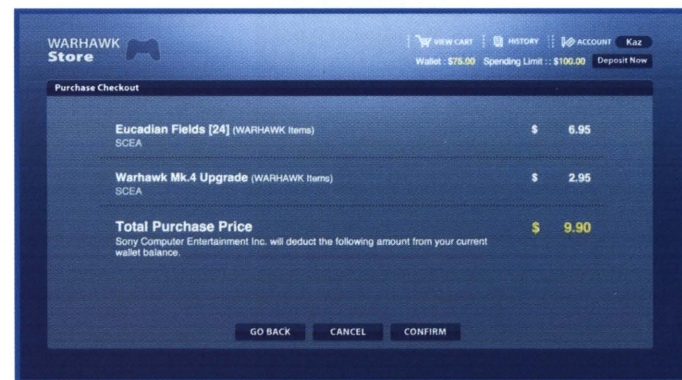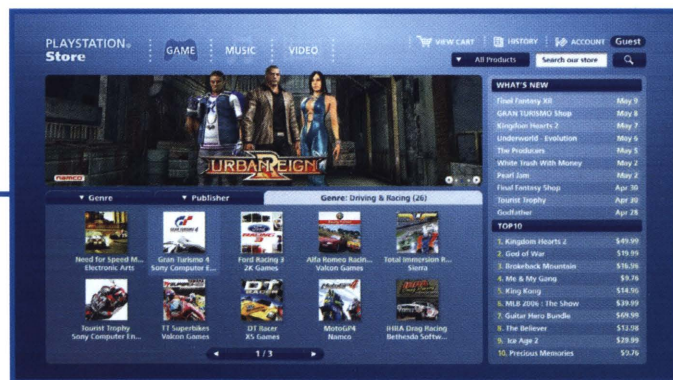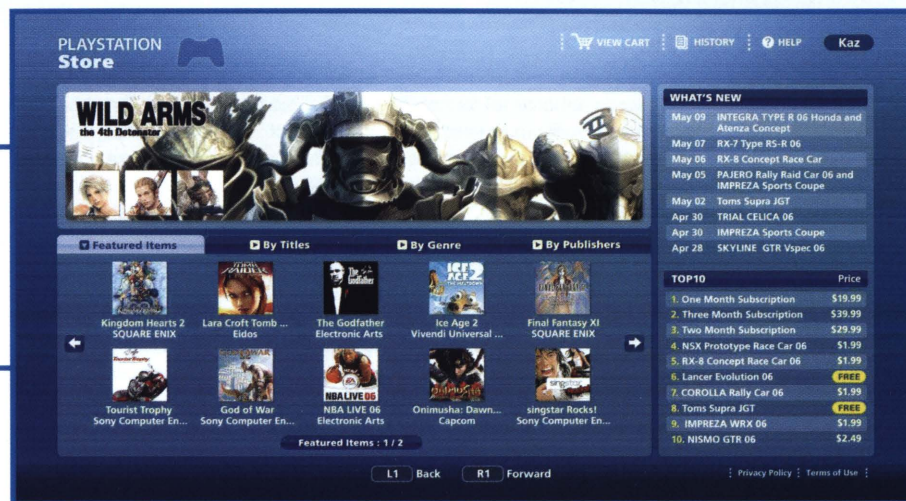
# SHOPPING WITH SONY

Sony and its many publishing partners fully expect downloadable content to become a fundamental part of the PlayStation 3 experience. Only recently, however, has the process of purchasing game add-ons been clarified…

### ENTERING THE SHOP
Under the Network option on PS3's XMB can be found the PlayStation Store, which is where nearly all download activity will be handled. Looking very much like the webpage of a traditional online shop, and therefore a more lively and welcoming sight than Xbox 360's over-integrated download sections, the front section organises everything available into groups, placing together demos, entire game downloads, 'featured items' (presumably publishers can pay to have their content appear in these slots, much as they do with web ad campaigns), and so on.

### DOWNLOADING ENTIRE GAMES
Sony has revealed that 40 full games are in the works for PS3 download, including *Calling All Cars* and *Blast Factor* (see p12), and each will cost up to $15 in the US, with UK prices to be confirmed. Interestingly, these games will be tied to users' IDs, so it will be possible to log in to a friend's PS3 and download on to his machine the game you've already purchased. The game will be removed once you log out, however, and can be downloaded only five times in total.

### REVIVING YESTERYEAR
Sony has confirmed that it will be bringing old games from other, non-Sony platforms to PS3, much as Nintendo is with Wii, and these will also be available via the PlayStation Store. Only PC Engine and Mega Drive have been referenced to date, with no confirmation of forthcoming titles, although pricing should be the same as on Wii. Sony

will also be selling PS1 games here, although initially only for download to PSP, on which they will run under emulation. (Sony says that PS3 will be able to run PS1 games soon after launch.)

### BITS AND PIECES
Many PS3 games will offer support for additional items to be purchased to supplement what is shipped on the disc. From weapons to character costumes to entire new episodes, it'll all be featured here, sorted by game title, some of it offered for free, and much of it for a fee, sometimes minimal, sometimes significant. *Gran Turismo HD* has been offered up as a torch bearer for this system, shipping on disc at a less-than-normal cost with a less-than-normal complement of cars and tracks, allowing users to build a racing game to suit their own tastes (and budget). Sony has yet to reveal its proposed pricing plan, however.

What's certain to be offered for free download will be game demos, plus upcoming game and movie trailers (in both HD and SD formats). At some point after launch, music albums and even full movies will also be available to download, at appropriate prices.

### OPENING THE WALLET
In the PlayStation Store, each user has a Wallet, which is filled with actual real-world cash (there are no such things as points here) via credit card transactions or the purchase of PlayStation Cards at retail. Users can share cash, so in a multi-user household a father may wish to give his two sons £5 each to spend however they wish, for example. Once purchases have been chosen, the user moves on to the checkout section, where your cart's contents are spelled out (again, parallels with internet activity are evident) and the transaction is confirmed.
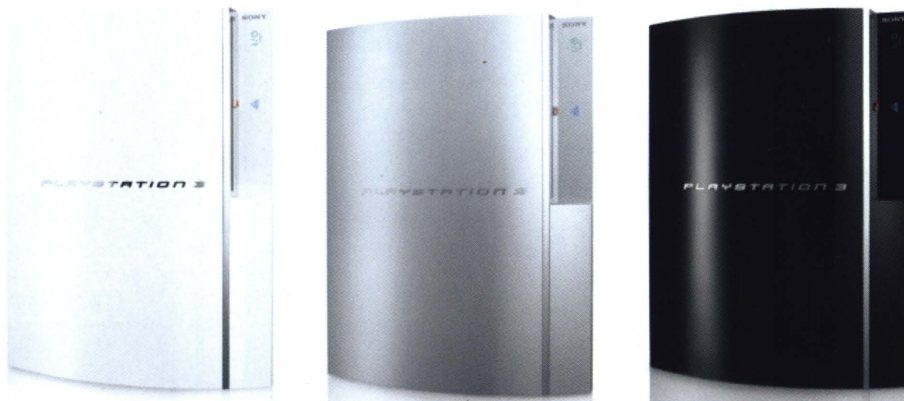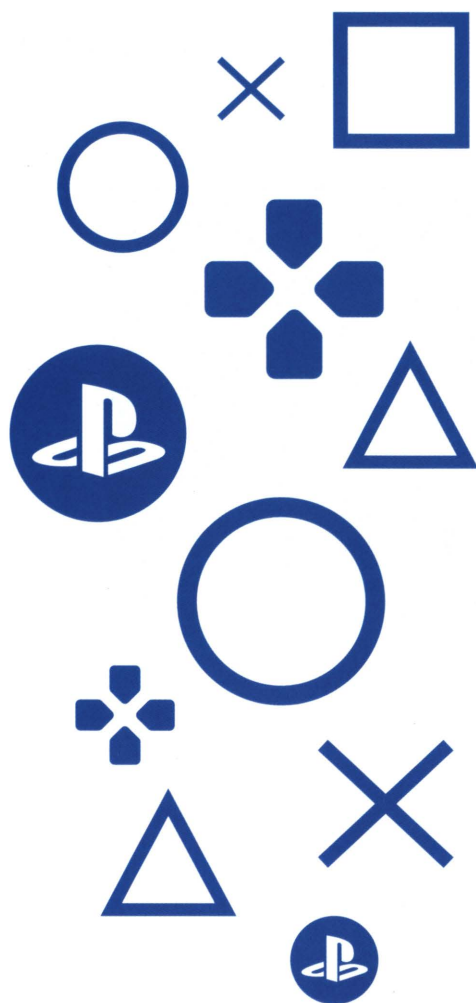
PlayStation 3 prototypes exist in various colours, but only black was available at launch. However, the console arrived in two flavours overseas – a 60GB hard drive version with built-in Wi-Fi and slots for external memory units, and a 20GB hard drive version without



The PlayStation 3 cross media bar (above), aka XMB, was first used in Sony's PSX multimedia platform (top), which launched in Japan in December 2003. For more PSX details, see **E133**

time so that each video stored on your hard drive appears in a thumbnail format showing its actual moving content. You can edit the appearance of these thumbnails, too, choosing to have the beginning of their cycle taken from, say, 15 seconds into the video. (Pointless? Consider having ten HD movie trailers on your PS3, all of which begin with the MPAA rating screen, followed by their own series of movie-studio logos, before getting into the action – how much easier would it be if your thumbnails were all cut to the chase, to allow immediate identification?)

Internet browsing is similarly slinky, offering up to six simultaneous windows lined up in a grid, each zooming into close-up view when selected. As with any browser, font sizes can be changed, thus enhancing useability on SDTVs, and support is offered for Flash-coded content, etc (like the rest of the OS, the browser has the potential to be upgraded over time to ensure compatibility with technological developments). A USB or wireless keyboard can be attached for data entry, although Sony seems convinced that its numeric keypad-style pop-up interface, a version of which also operates on PSP, will cover many users' needs with its T9 predictive-text functionality and extensive dictionary (offering 'English' and 'British English' language options, even though they should be 'American English' and 'English', no?).

**Connecting other external** devices is simple thanks to PS3's adoption of Bluetooth, which can search for headsets, mice and other kit to be utilised in gaming environments. The most common device likely to be linked to PS3, though,

is PSP, via Wi-Fi connection (ad-hoc or over a local network) in order to enter what Sony terms Remote Play mode. Once the connection is made, this brings up a black display on your TV screen along with the legend 'Remote Play in progress'. Your PS3 hardware is now under the control of your PSP: the base console is taking the data it would normally be rendering to the TV, compressing it for the handheld's screen, and outputting it as streaming video, while your PSP inputs are sent back the other way. Remote Play operates with any 'linear media content', meaning you could use your PSP to access CDs, DVDs or Blu-ray DVDs sitting in your PS3's optical drive, or indeed anything stored on its hard drive. It can be brought into operation at any time, too, meaning that you could begin watching a movie in the living room, pause it, enter Remote Play, then retire upstairs to bed and pick it up again on your PSP from the precise point you froze the action.

Sony's plans for Remote Play are an extension of its LocationFree TV technology, and soon after launch you will be able to link your PSP to your PS3 via a peer-to-peer connection over the internet to drastically improve its usefulness. So if you fell asleep watching that movie last night you can catch the end in your lunch hour at work. Or share your photos from home with your colleagues. Intriguingly, you'll also be able to use PS3's internet browser from PSP in this mode, thereby improving its web-surfing capacity, and clearly this *isn't* linear media content, so being able to run at least some types of games in Remote Play seems certain to be made possible in the future. Sony's handheld console has been left
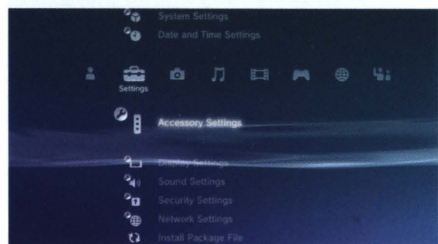


Sony's own *F1* uses Cell's SPUs to create supremely effective rain-on-camera-lens effects. Not pictured here is a sequence from the game which renders so-called God rays in real time, a technique that is somehow subtle yet overwhelming at the same time. More cunning SPU useage is evident in Ninja Theory's *Heavenly Sword* (right), which, as those of you who read **Edge**'s cover story will recall, dedicates an entire unit to calculating the dynamics of its heroine's tresses

PS3's Compact Flash, SD/mini SD and Memory Stick slots sit beneath a slightly flimsy-feeling plastic flap, with its four USB 2.0 ports located further down the face, near the unit's base

behind by the gaming value of Nintendo's DS; perhaps it's only with its PS3-media functionality that it'll make up ground.

In terms of the bigger media picture, Sony's decision to opt for the Blu-ray format has been the most contentious manoeuvre in its PS3 strategy. But games are getting bigger. Bigger than can be held by a 9GB DVD? Clearly – it's happening with launch software like Insomniac's *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. DVD was always going to be superseded, and Sony's logic has dictated that it is more sensible to get in on the ground floor with an emerging successor rather than in five or six years' time with whichever console follows PS3. What's actually disconcerting about Blu-ray being a part of PS3 picture is the very fact that Xbox 360 uses previous-generation optical storage, which will result in many multiformat releases being produced to the limitations of the lower-capacity platform, thereby placing artificial restraints on certain types of PS3 gaming.

Will you want to buy your favourite movies again in super Blu-ray-o-vision? Will the wide-scale support for Blu-ray from Hollywood's leading movie studios remain in place forever? Aren't we

functionality, because Sony will be unwrapping a more fully fledged package of services in early 2007, and in the first instance it will be down to games like *Resistance* to map out a tentative shape for the system. We asked **Phil Harrison**, SCE's head of worldwide studios, about upcoming functionality. Matchmaking? "Yes." Online content/support for every game? "It won't be obligatory. Some games will tick all the boxes, and others won't." Cross-game invites? He demonstrates PS3's network messaging option, sitting as an independent layer on top of the action in *Blast Factor*, to communicate with a colleague who's running a different game. Voice chat in every game? "No reason why not."

**Early adopters will** therefore go without certain pieces of the bigger PS3 vision until Sony introduces system upgrades, although obviously, because of manufacturing hitches, the number of affected users will be relatively small. The first consoles to hit the market have already found owners via pre-order schemes, and Sony will not be able to make consoles fast enough to meet demand until well into 2007, which may have



With tweaks, PS3's web browser is perfectly at home on an SD display, although clearly HD is preferable. Flipping between windows (right) is quick and smooth

## Sony will be unwrapping a more fully fledged package of online gaming services in 2007

forgetting about Betamax, MiniDisc and UMD? Valid questions all, and certain to have a bearing on PS3's future as a movie playback device.

**It is as** a gaming device, though, that PlayStation 3 will be most closely scrutinised by its first wave of adopters. And, at launch, its games will look like those of most new platforms when they first arrive, with a handful of previously unseen presentational values – 1080p support will be of particular note to those with compatible displays – but little to suggest that gaming is about to be shaken to its foundations. (Only Nintendo has any kind of record of producing launch games capable of doing that.) But there is no question that this hardware, for all of its extracurricular non-gaming aspirations, is more capable than Xbox 360 when it comes to simply crunching code (*Lair*, to pick one first-generation PS3 game, could not be done, like-for-like, on Microsoft's console). And, encouragingly, it is clear that developers have a better handle on PS3's architecture than they did PS2's at its launch.

One aspect of the PS3 picture that won't be entirely clear at launch is its online gaming

interesting, and potentially unpleasant, implications for the March rollout in Europe.

Who doesn't want a PS3? Many have said that the estimated Euro PS3 price of £425 is simply too much, forgetting that, nearly 20 years ago, we were paying £500 for the era's most powerful gaming machine (Commodore's Amiga A500, if you've forgotten too). Does a PS3 have £145 more functionality than a £280 Xbox 360? It's hard to argue otherwise. Sony's console is a sophisticated beast with the price tag to match. Of course, expenditure is a bigger issue for those who were encouraged to enter the HD era with Xbox 360 12 months ago, whose £1,500 720p TVs no longer look so robustly futureproof…

As far as PS3's futureproofing goes, as Phil Harrison notes within these pages, every console game developer of any significance worldwide is fully behind Sony, though the sweetest fruits of their labours won't begin appearing until next year, by which time the platform will have matured somewhat. It will still be the most expensive console on shop shelves, but there will be more reasons to pick one up if you remain unmoved by the digital entertainment hub hubbub.
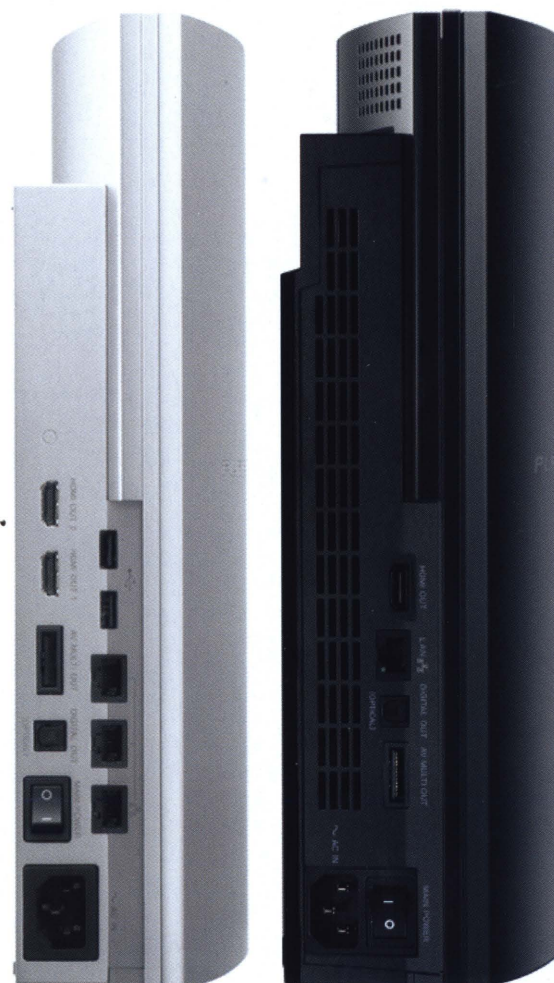


One interesting difference between the initial PS3 design (left), mocked up for E3 '05, and the final format is the original proposal of two HDMI outputs for simultaneous video to multiple displays. Heavy ventilation is another revamp

# THE HARD SELL

## THINGS TO PLAY WITH AT LAUNCH

### PS3 (UK COST: TBC)

It won't be on European store shelves until March '07, but the PlayStation 3 hardware's exterior isn't set to change between now and then (it will have changed inside thanks to firmware upgrades), meaning that UK owners will receive the same bulky, distinctive-looking console that has just launched in Japan and America.

The finished unit is unquestionably more friendly to the eye than the prototype first held up in front of attendees of Sony's press conference at E3 '05, the original vision a silver device which contrasted sharply with the off-white finish popularised by Apple's iPod and since adopted by Microsoft and Nintendo, leaving Sony, once so synonymous with classic product design, looking strangely out of touch. In super-reflective black, the console feels more in step with AV trends, sitting comfortably alongside contemporary high-end HDTV sets.

Approximately 20mm wider, 15mm taller and 20mm fatter than an Xbox 360 (with hard drive attached), the PS3 console is also heavier than Microsoft's unit, a factor mostly attributable to its hefty integrated PSU (not soundproofing, which had previously been suggested).

The hardware's memory unit slots (see p7), meanwhile, are supplemented by red, blue and green LEDs near its power-up 'button' to indicate various states of operation, plus two further LEDs to reveal hard disc and Wi-Fi activity. Around the back are ports for HDMI, ethernet, optical and Sony's own AV out format, plus a rocker-style power switch.

Aside from its unconventional form factor, perhaps the most unusual PS3 design touch is the aforementioned power-up 'button' which serves to bring the console out of standby mode: like the disc eject 'button' it is actually touch sensitive. In one respect, then, PS3 still appears like a product from another era.

# SIXAXIS (ONE PACKED IN; ADDITIONAL UNIT UK COST: TBC)

Though it is an obvious extension of Sony's well-established DualShock controller line, the PlayStation 3 joypad's absence of rumble functionality removes the 'Shock' from its name, replaced by a moniker that references its motion-sensing capacity, interpreting pitch and yaw, and also movement in space.

Connecting to the PS3 hardware via Bluetooth, Sixaxis has all of DualShock 2's other functionality, as well as redesigned

L2 and R2 shoulder buttons, which are more analogue trigger-like in operation. Pressure sensitivity has been retained in the face buttons (and L1 and L2), and there is heightened sensitivity in its dual sticks, thereby shrinking (not entirely eliminating) DualShock 2's so-called dead zones. At the centre of the joypad, meanwhile, sits a 'PlayStation' button which can be used to power PS3 up and down from standby, and

also bring up the controller menu for viewing battery charge (Sixaxis units are charged from PS3 via USB 2.0 connections) and managing assigned controller numbers. Despite each controller featuring only four LEDs at the rear to denote the relative player number, up to seven can be connected simultaneously. In such instances the LEDs light up in pairs for players five and beyond ('4' + '1' = player five, and so on).

# MOTORSTORM

PUBLISHER: **SCEE** DEVELOPER: **EVOLUTION STUDIOS**
ORIGIN: **UK** RELEASE: **Q1 2007**





Trucks may seem fearsome, but they can be a lonely, drowsy ride until you've built up the experience to exploit their exclusive shortcuts and use their bulk as a bludgeon. Their most natural environments may be the ram-raiding jostle of online

O f the two tracks available in *MotorStorm*'s preview code – Canyon and Rain – the former offers a circuit that wends its way through a rocky corridor along both high road and low road, and feels like a surprisingly tame setting. The latter, however, showcases the game's philosophy and strengths far more successfully, being a next-gen racecourse in more than just topsoil. It's a muddy wedding cake of a mountaintop, a track that feels like *MotorStorm* belongs to it, and not the other way around. It's a rough loop around a summit that features multi-tiered paths that are forever owffering disastrously tempting shortcuts, and bring out the rugged and ragged nature of its races perfectly, making each lap equally chaotic and addictively unpredictable.

It feels like the ideal home for *MotorStorm*'s high-fatality dirt-derby, where vehicles are so very eager to detonate when flipped or crashed, and quickly respawned to be fed back into the fray. The relationship between vehicle and terrain is heated and treacherous, and Rain is a fine presentation of how *MotorStorm* is just as much about what's under the tyres as under the bonnet. Just how deeply this notion penetrates the rest of the game, however, is crucial, and as yet unknown.

# LAIR

PUBLISHER: **SCEE** DEVELOPER: **FACTOR 5**
ORIGIN: **US** RELEASE: **2007**



Lair's world seems to have been designed to be looked at from altitude. The dragons and buildings are sharply rendered, but ground textures can be muddy if you get in too close to them

R iding on a dragon is a fantasy deeply rooted in so many gamers' minds, soaring on leathery wings in control of an airborne crematorium in the tradition of *Temeraire* or *Pern*. So it comes as a jolt, even a disappointment, to be asked to fly through rings.

But that's exactly what you do. Chunky, solid rings hang in the air to teach you an important lesson – that without paying a bit of attention to the tutorial, you'll be all over the place. Tilt control is part of *Lair* like the analogue stick was in *Mario 64*, and the use of fingers more usually relegated to simply holding the pad's shoulders to swoop, dive and climb takes a bit of mental adjustment. Once the switch has flipped, however, and the

default high level of sensitivity tamed through a series of over-corrections, it all begins to seem perfectly natural, as if dragons were always meant to be tilted at.

Factor 5's *Rogue Leader* makes its presence known, the endless circling while attempting to get a lock on a passing dragon reminiscent of trying to pick out a TIE Fighter from a starfield, but once lock is achieved, fireballs and motion-controlled bodyslams turn your bump-mapped beast into one of gaming's biggest weapons.

Best of all are the executions, a blow from a mace leading to a lethal plummet or distracting another rider so your dragon can chomp him into bits, automated moves with a high level of flourish indicative of *Lair*'s overall execution.



Ground troops have no qualms about opening fire on your dragon, their arrows protruding from its skin as you fly past



While in the air you are a soaring fusion of man and beast; on the ground you're more of a waddling duck. Deadly to infantry through the use of fireballs and your swishing tail, fights with larger foes never feel like they are truly under control

# DEVIL MAY CRY 4

PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
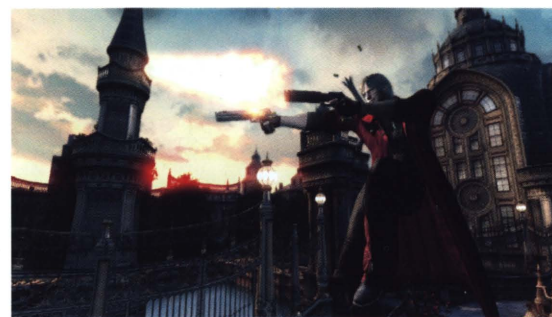ORIGIN: **JAPAN** RELEASE: **TBC**

For all the rumours that *Devil May Cry* would go multiplatform this generation, the series is inextricably intertwined with PlayStation: both defined by name and style above all else. It's a series in which the lead character is a rumour – changing design, age, history and demeanour from game to game, and in *Devil May Cry 4* teasers alone undergoing three visual makeovers before settling in as a secondary character.

The strength of *Devil May Cry*'s brand is such that after the Tokyo Game Show demo you won't recall newcomer Nero's coat is blue, only the red

of his hood; you may forget he wields only one sidearm, not dual pistols. He moves, fights, feels like Dante should, a catherine wheel of velour-red, snow-white and sword blur.

So *Devil May Cry 4*, and by degrees PlayStation 3, are exactly what you'd expect – the whipcracking framerate, the unflinching solidity – and the question now is what the sucker-punch entails. Was the TGS demo's sameness a Trojan horse to ease showgoers into the series' reinvention and the console's power? Nero's devil-possessed arm, here able to pluck and slam enemies into combo strings, can't be the entirety of what producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi claims is only possible on the new machine. His throttle-handled blade will rely on 'acceleration' for its combat mechanic, we're coyly told, but in the demo swipes only with liquid, predictable grace.

It's the devil you know, and to be fair that could be enough – but surely all that cloth simulation isn't just in aid of being able to more accurately ride its own coat-tails.

Cleaving blocks of shanty-town with each sweep of his sword, boss Variel is a bona fide next-gen spectacle – tellingly inflicting the only framerate hiccups

Even being reduced to Nero's single revolver (top) instead of Dante's twin pistols (centre) doesn't tangibly affect gunslinging

# EYE OF JUDGEMENT

PUBLISHER: **SCEA** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
ORIGIN: **US** RELEASE: **TBC**

After the disappearance of E3 2005's futuristic spy caper *Eyedentify* – which we hope has only gone undercover, not been prematurely retired – the focus of PlayStation 3 camera interaction has been on *Eye Of Judgement*. And it's a canny showman. Hold a creature card under its camera arm and it springs to life in your palm on the screen, reacting so believably belligerently to a finger prod that you'll find it hard not to look down at your actual hands and be disappointed.

As a card-battling game, it may disappoint on another level – the 3x3 grid of the play area feels as if it can support only so many permutations of strategy, let alone only two players. While watching your cards lay waste to each other in lavish battle sequences is, again, quite the showcase, we can't help but wonder what will be left for *EOJ* when the novelty wears off – can it even afford to offer a skip command?

It lacks neither complexity or looks, but the two seem married for show rather than convenience, with both the card game and the onscreen version lagged by their connection. And yet this undoubtedly a next-generation card trick: whatever its flaws may be, *EOJ* has sufficiently advanced technology to pass for magic.

Victory is achieved by holding five of the available nine grid squares (top). Like a next-generation treatment of *Archon* (but without the hands-on element), the grid conceit is abandoned when creatures clash (below), instead taking place in suitably styled arenas. Overall, creature design runs from mildly inspired to shamelessly cribbed
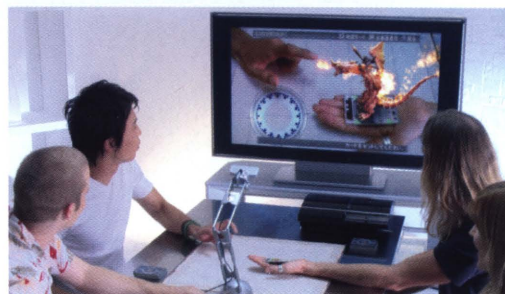
# BLAST FACTOR

PUBLISHER: **SCEA** DEVELOPER: **BLUEPOINT GAMES**
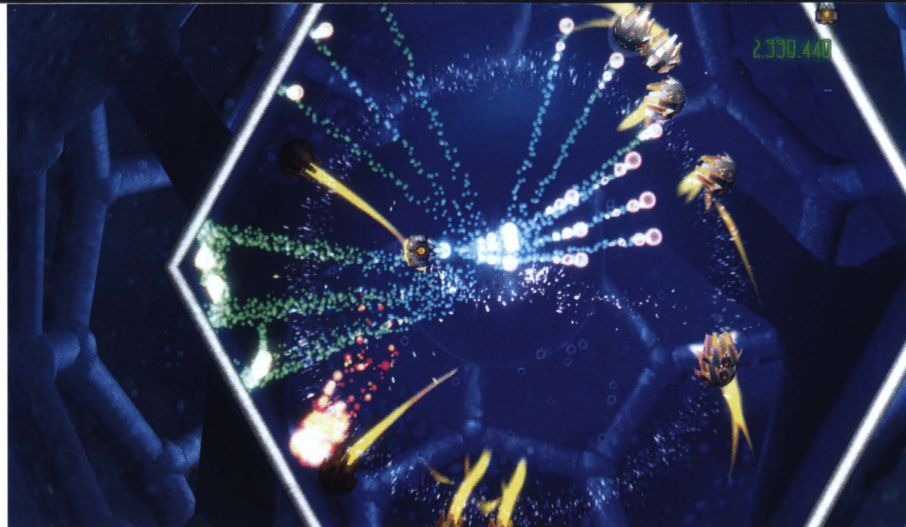ORIGIN: **US** RELEASE: **OUT NOW**



Reputedly the work of only five creatives, *Blast Factor* is patently intended to find favour with those who've made Xbox Live Arcade a success, inspired as it is by Bizarre's neon-spattered *Geometry Wars* games and, to a greater degree, PomPom's *Mutant Storm*.

Each level of the game is set on a panel of a giant blue polyhedron. As you'd expect, enemies attack in waves, and annihilating everything that comes your way moves you on to the next panel, of which there are 100 in total.

The XBLA shooter influences arrive chiefly in the control scheme, which makes use of the Sixaxis's left stick to manoeuvre your craft and the right stick to direct and spit laser fire, and also the presentation, which fizzes and pops with brightly coloured projectiles to create an hypnotically fierce gaming environment.

What obviously hasn't been seen in any non-PS3 shooter of this style, however, is support for Sixaxis motion-sensing functionality: a quick controller tilt causes a wave to roll horizontally across the playfield, disturbing enemies that get in its way. This is vital even in early levels, faced with foes that are only vulnerable to shots once they've been flipped over by a wave. Then the game begins to throw up enemies that have already been flipped alongside others than need to be flipped, whereupon further waves will obviously reverse the scenario – which is when you really have to start thinking about things…

A quick play suggests that it's not as gimmicky as it first appears, but only extended sessions will reveal whether or not *Blast Factor* has the longevity of XBLA's finest two-stick shooters.



Even the early levels throw a variety of enemy types into the mix, and hosing away smaller foes needs to be blended with repeatedly striking bigger threats
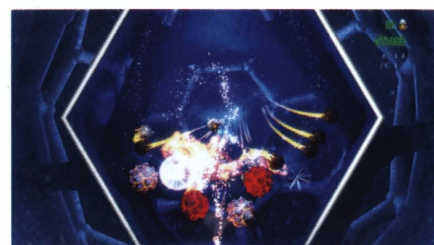




Yes, you've seen games like *Blast Factor* on Xbox 360, but never in 1080p. The game also promises to adjust its difficulty level in accordance with your ability, which seems a little odd for a game that emphasises its global high-score table

# CALLING ALL CARS

PUBLISHER: **SCEA** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE (SCE SANTA MONICA/INCOGNITO)**
ORIGIN: **US** RELEASE: **TBC**

Previously known as *Criminal Crackdown*, *Calling All Cars* has been summed up by its designer David Jaffe as a cross between *Bomberman*, *Destruction Derby* and basketball, although there are parallels, too, with his *Twisted Metal* series of car combat titles.

Two things strike you when entering its gameworld: first, this is a weirdly dark place, its cartoony architecture shaded black around the edges; second, pressing left and right on the Sixaxis stick does not make your vehicle steer in those directions – instead, pushing up moves you up the screen, down moves down, and so on. The first few minutes of play are therefore spent getting your head around this unusual setup, but fortunately the game's premise is so simple that it doesn't take long to begin making progress.

The objective is to drive around the game's varied maps searching for criminals (pointers at the edge of the screen reveal the direction you should be heading). Once you've collected the perp, you head for the police station to deposit him in one of three different areas. Taking him in via the front entrance is quick and easy but not worth as many points as driving up a ramp and into the building's first floor – something that can prove surprisingly tricky at speed. Your scoring isn't helped, meanwhile, by other players smashing into your car and unloading weapons in an attempt to steal the bounty for themselves.

Like *Blast Factor*, *Calling All Cars* has full 1080p support, so the game promises to be at its best with a full complement of four players in splitscreen mode on the biggest TV you can find.
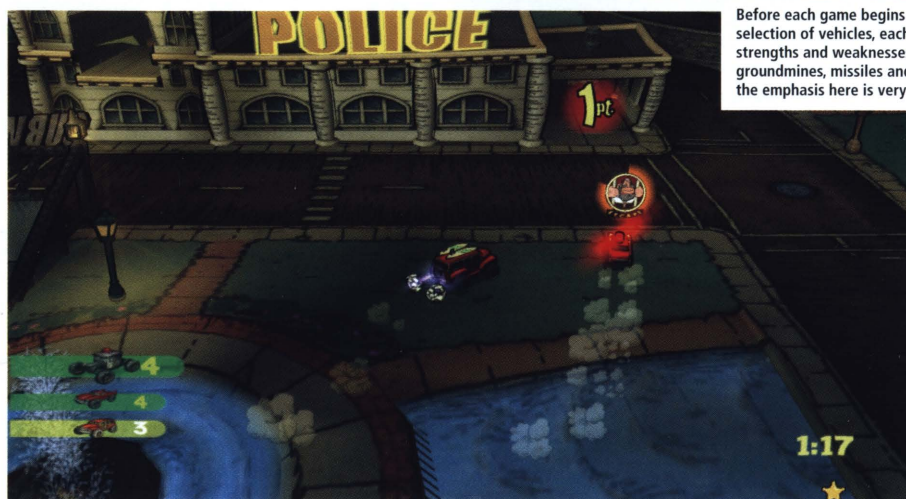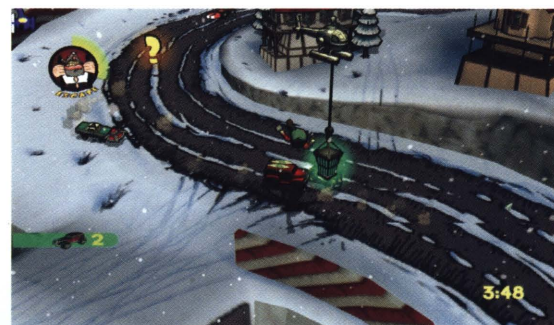




Before each game begins you're given a selection of vehicles, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Weapons include groundmines, missiles and giant hammers – the emphasis here is very much on humour

# GO! SWIZZLEBLOCK 2

PUBLISHER: **SCEA** DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE**
ORIGIN: **US** RELEASE: **OUT NOW**
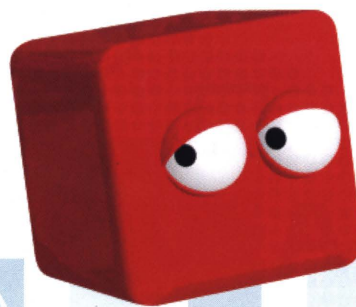
If *flOw* is PlayStation 3 online's transcendental dismissal of Live Arcade's garish excess, *Swizzleblock 2* is a direct response to its casual-appeal titles. Peel away the overly-busy skin and it's any number of block-matching puzzles (a 'Hallucination' mode that transforms completed sections into animals unconsciously game-checks *Zoo Keeper*).

The most openly retro and unassuming of PS3's downloadable lineup – more so than the inevitable *Lemmings* remake or a *Sudoku* title –

it's an open admission that new experiences aren't the most reliable route to growing an online community. It's probably the same reason that a 2D, one-touch mechanic was chosen over relaunching any of Sony's own puzzle properties: those left wanting for a *Kurushi* or *Devil Dice* successor will be directed to the PS1 library.

Fourplayer online coop and pin-sharp resolution make the case for *Swizzleblock 2* not being completely divorced from the possibilities presented by PlayStation 3, but beyond that it feels like a test case for a predictable result: it's not *Lumines*-cool or *Fantavision*-kitch, but will likely perform better for it.



This isn't, as you might expect from Sony, anything like as taut and hip as *Lumines*, but it does fill a puzzler-shaped hole in PlayStation 3's launch software catalogue
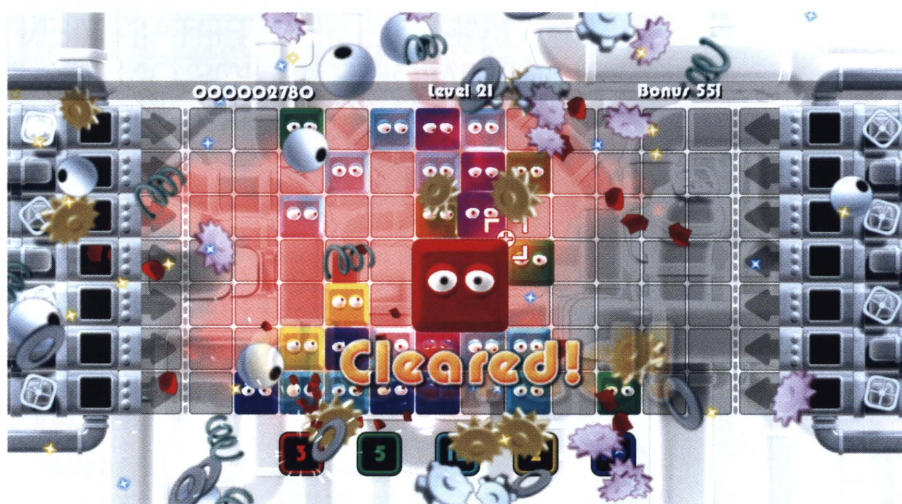


# FLOW

PUBLISHER: **SCEA** DEVELOPER: **THATGAMECOMPANY LLC**
ORIGIN: **US** RELEASE: **TBC**

Where PSP hosted a doujin shooter remade into abstract art installation in *Every Extend Extra*, PlayStation 3 lends hi-def gravitas to *flOw*'s Master of Fine Arts thesis. It's an obvious gauntlet thrown down to Live Arcade – race you to next year's Indie Game Jam finalists – but it's also the only demonstration of that self-assured, otherworldly PlayStation cool yet shown for the machine.

Though it recalls the submarine fragility of *Electroplankton*, *flOw* is marginally more hands-on: a dot-eat-dot evolutionary study, a scoreless but nonetheless arcade reading of Darwin. Unhurried and ambient in visuals and audio, the PS3 version is ultimately competitive, with play statistics ranked globally online. However, dynamic difficulty scaling should accommodate both aggressive play and the more sedate pace its 'Zen' genre label suggests.

Like developer Jenova Chen's other freeware-born title *Cloud* (itself possibly up for a PS3 reworking), *flOw* swims a fine line between being an attack on artifice or distractingly narcissistic. It is, in other words, a perfect PlayStation arthouse title, and its downloadable state may yet find *flOw* the acceptance that Sony's shelf-sold curios have struggled to find.
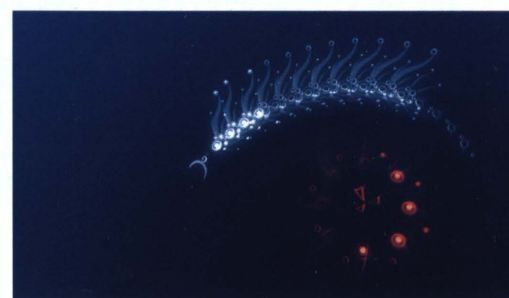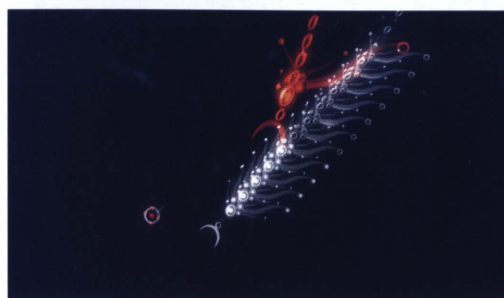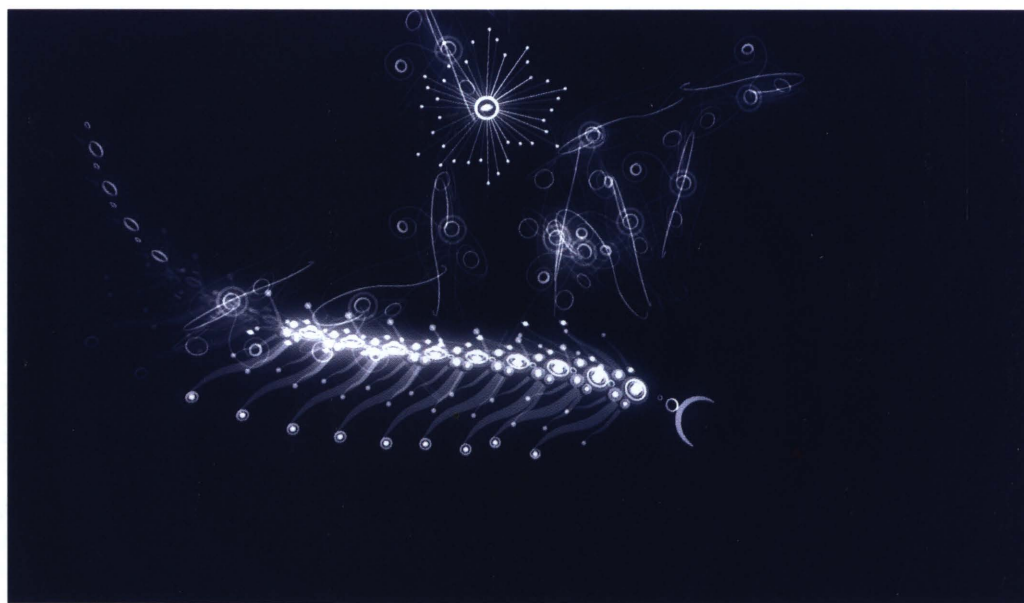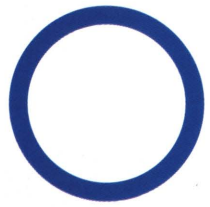






*FlOw*'s ambient dynamic plays like a stressless version of mobile classic *Snake*. Factoring in a dream-like sense of movement and depth, it's easy to become transfixed by its goal-free, open-ended trippiness. Chen cites creative psychology as a major influence in attempting to evolve its gameplay

# ⊞ Q&A:
# PHIL HARRISON

## SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT'S HEAD OF WORLDWIDE STUDIOS ON ALL THINGS PS3

**S**eated in his Soho office and finally able to show off finished PS3 hardware, we find **Phil Harrison** in relaxed mood. Sony's confused-looking appearance at E3 is a distant memory, and right now he's looking forward to putting PS3s into consumers' hands. We begin our discussion with talk of the hardware's future.

**[SCEA president] Kaz Hirai recently said that PS3 will lay down the foundation for the next ten years in digital entertainment. Where does that 'ten years' come from?**
It was in relation to the precedent that we've set with PlayStation 1 and PlayStation 2, that these formats have had ten-year lifespans. PlayStation 1 software is still selling, and although we've

PlayStation 2 – to the next trend in digital entertainment, and that helped prolong the lifespan of the machine. And PlayStation 3 is anticipated to follow the same trend. There's no denying that adopting Blu-ray this early has proved to be painful and difficult but it will yield tremendous future-proof benefits.

**[SCEA executive VP] Jack Tretton has also referenced the lack of what he called an "external power brick". Why was PS3 designed with an integrated PSU?**
Somebody else asked me this question – it surprised me how important it is to people. But I'll explain. There are two answers – one is because we've got good hardware designers who can
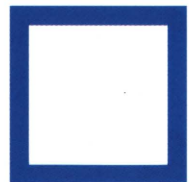
## "Adopting Blu-ray this early has proved painful but it will yield tremendous results"

stopped selling the hardware, we actually manufactured it for 11 years to get to the final number – around 108m machines. It was really reinforcing the point that PlayStation 1 and certainly PlayStation 2 bucked the trend – everybody said the videogame console rule is a five-year lifespan and that certainly had been the case with 8bit and 16bit, but PlayStation 1 changed that. By adopting technologies like CD on PlayStation 1 and DVD on PlayStation 2 we bought in early – certainly in the case of

integrate the incredible amount of technology into one box in a form factor that's quiet, that dissipates heat effectively, and looks nice, but the other reason is that actually we have to, because the performance characteristics of the main chips, Cell and RSX, mean that we have to locate the power source as close to those chips as we possibly can.

**At the San Francisco Gamer's Day in October, Kaz Hirai parodied himself by repeating his "*Riiidge Racer!*" line from E3, which was a surprise because Sony doesn't have a reputation for its sense of humour.**
Well, we have been accused of being arrogant, and I can say that it's not a deliberate strategy by any means. But I also think that where we have not been able to answer all the questions, when you say "no comment", you give the impression of being arrogant, but when you have all the answers, which we did at Gamer's Day, you don't need to spin anything.

**Those pieces of the puzzle seemed to come together late in the process. Was that really**
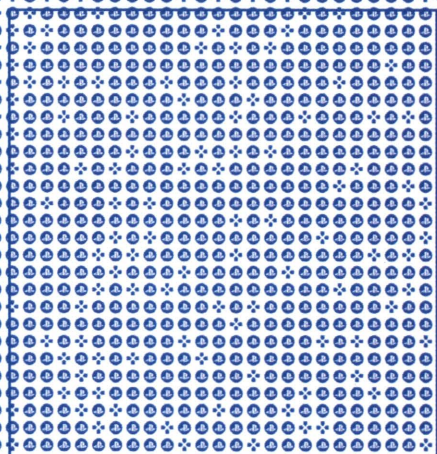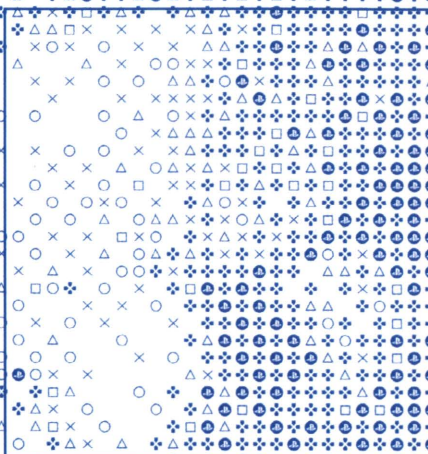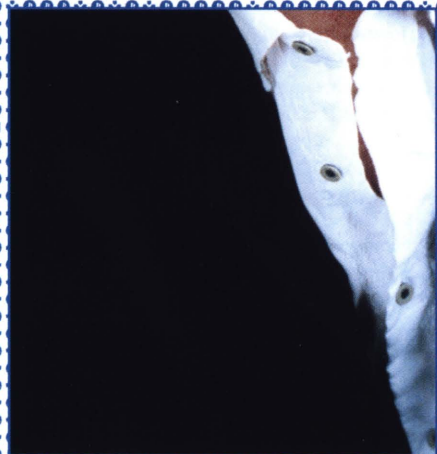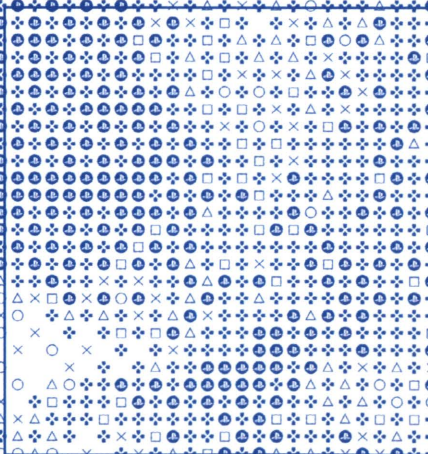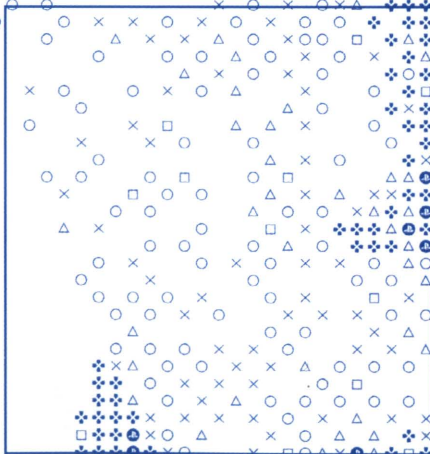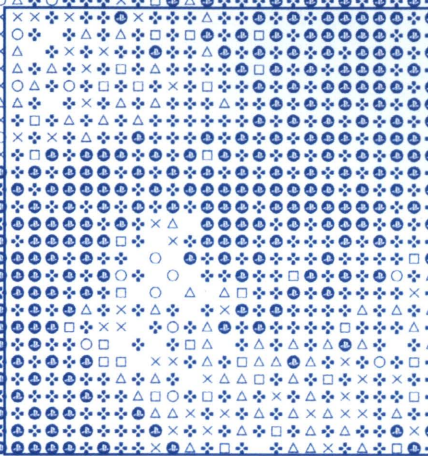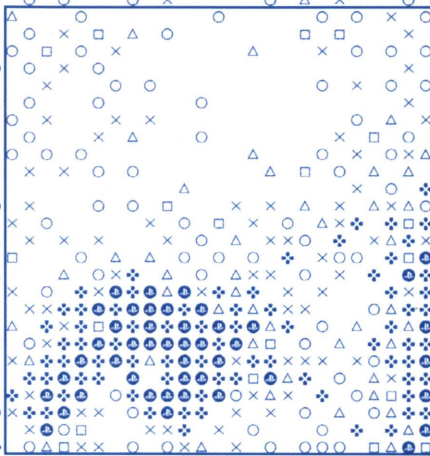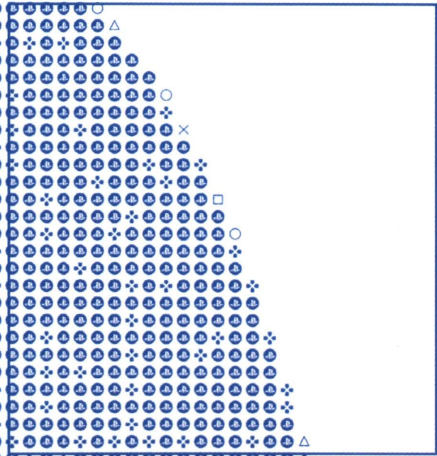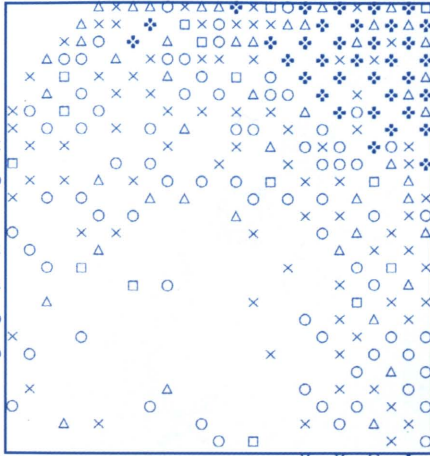
**the case, or is this an issue of how your progress was being communicated?**
Both. It's a very complicated piece of equipment. Hardware was actually finished a long, long time ago and was in place a long time ago – blue laser diodes notwithstanding – but the software piece, as you can see, is very integrated and it has to work, and you couldn't reasonably show the individual components of this in isolation because you wouldn't get the same experience. Having that navigation showing the integrated nature of it, it just clicks into place.

**In terms of PS3 functionality, what is the deal with installing disc-delivered games on to the hard drive?**
Games can install some of their components to hard drive, and there is caching functionality built into the hard drive. Since every machine has a hard drive, that is an opportunity for developers to take advantage of.

**It's been speculated that this option is there because Blu-ray access times aren't especially good. This was on the internet, of course.**
It must be true, then! [Laughs] No, there is always a situation when you are mastering a game for launch where your logical disc geography is not optimal; the way the files are distributed on the disc is by no means optimal, and that's something we had on PlayStation 1, PlayStation 2 and PSP. Pretty much every game system known to man has had that. That has got nothing to do with the loading speed of Blu-ray disc and everything to do with time to market for a developer. Having the ability to install certain files on the hard drive helps that situation, but going forward
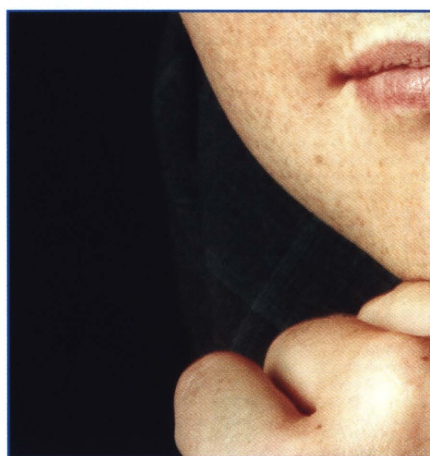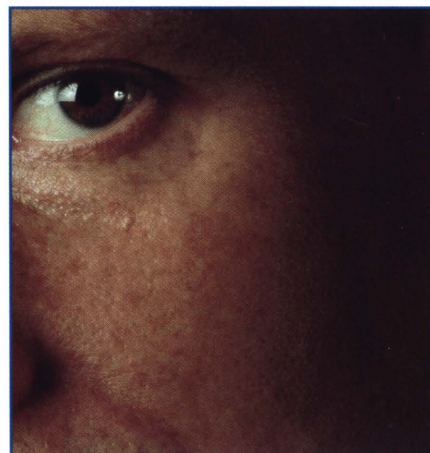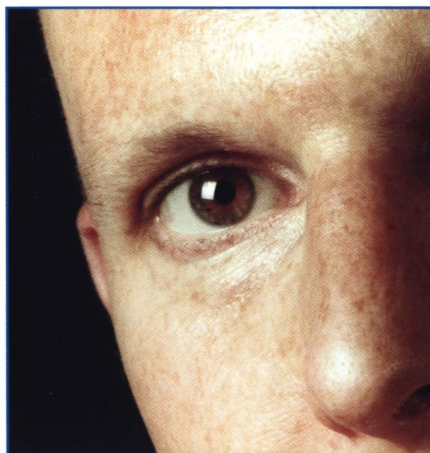
downloaded from the network, and in fact what is created and contributed by the user, so there will be large files stored on the hard drive by the applications. That doesn't exclusively mean

what at the time was a very risky decision to invest in our own silicon chip manufacturing and design capacity, and the GS and the Emotion Engine were both made at our own Nagasaki fab. For a long time this was actually part of Sony Computer Entertainment, but more recently it's been merged into Sony Semiconductor, and what that decision did was it meant that Sony went from being a modest player in semiconductor to being right on the bleeding edge of technology, which has benefits to the whole company. So Ken's vision there – and I remember the board meetings in which he had to fight for the money to be able to make that investment, and it was more than a billion dollars – has yielded tremendous benefits for the rest of the organisation. With PlayStation 3 the design of the Cell chip couldn't be done just by us, it had to be a collaboration with IBM and Toshiba, and it was Ken who put that collaboration together. Day-to-day management and operational handling was done by other people in the organisation but it was Ken's vision that, yes, we should design our own next-generation semiconductor for PS3 because nothing that currently exists is good enough, and you can start to see a few of the benefits of that [in the finished hardware].

**Moving on to Sixaxis control, will we see, proportionally, a lot of games that are built around its motion-sensing capability rather than having it as an option?**

## "The relationship between content on the disc and the player is going to radically change"
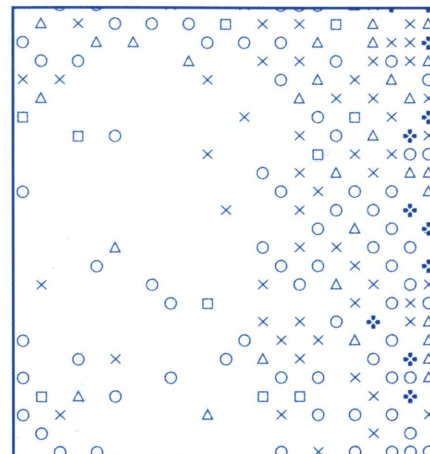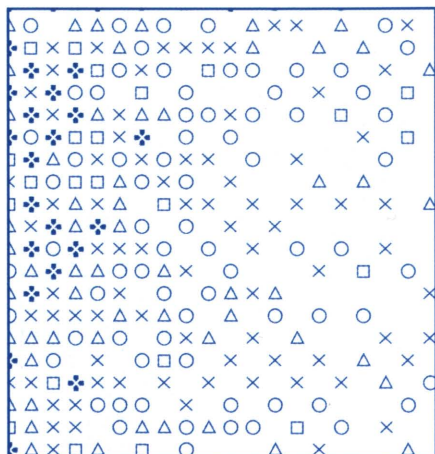
it's by no means a consumer disadvantage.
I should also say that the fixed relationship between content on the disc and the player, which has been the case with PlayStation 1 and PlayStation 2, is going to radically change on PlayStation 3 – there will be much more blurring of what ships on the disc, what is accessed and

caching, that just means the organic nature of the games: in the same way that the hardware is growing, so are the games, and that will become the norm going forward.

**Was it much more difficult to create PS3 than previous consoles? From the outside looking in, it's easy to imagine a lot more headaches within Sony on this project.**
Yes and no. I mean, I think that PlayStation 2 was actually probably the tipping point, to use a hackneyed phrase. When we designed the PlayStation 1 we relied largely on outside technology and outside manufacture, so the CPU came from LSI Logic and the graphics chip, although designed in collaboration with our engineers, the actual manufacture was done externally at Toshiba. And while that allowed us to get pretty low R&D costs – PlayStation 1 R&D costs were tiny – it didn't give us a great deal of control over cost. With PlayStation 2 we took

Yes, that'll come. We have a number in development which integrate the Sixaxis centrally to the experience, but we're not insisting any developer make use of it, either internally and externally. It's a great differentiating factor and where it works, and where gameplay innovation can come from it, that's great, it gives developers options beyond the traditional sticks and buttons. And, as I said at E3, having the subtlety of movement starts to get very interesting.

**What about 1080p support? It wasn't long ago that certain people were saying it wouldn't happen, right?**

Well, to be very specific it was a technical director at one of our major competitors who made a very bold statement saying that it would be impossible at launch, and he was clearly mistaken. If I've been over-pushing that point it's only because we've got great games that haven't been compromised in order to get 1080 progressive support in there, and if you look at the number of titles we showed at Gamer's Day, our own *NBA '07* game was in full HD, plus *Ridge Racer*, *Lair*, *Blast Factor*, *Criminal Crackdown*, *Gundam*, Sega's *Virtua Tennis*…
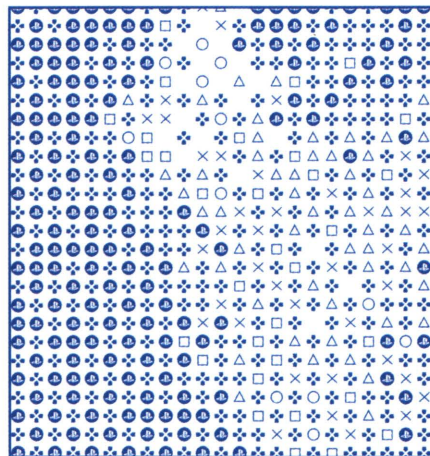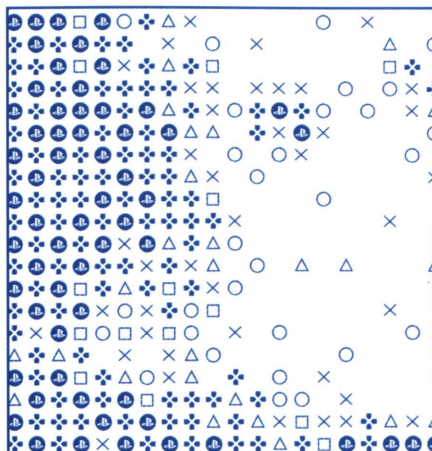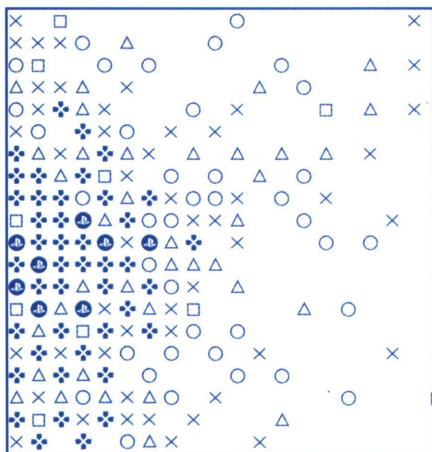
**Are we looking at a future in which all PS3 games are built for 1080p?**

During the lifespan of PlayStation 3 I expect there will come a point where you cannot buy anything less than a 1080p [display] panel, so it's conceivable that at some point in the lifespan of the PlayStation 3 – I'm talking about the ten-year vision for the platform – you would make a game that only supported 1080p because of the

Yes, and that's a fairly natural progression in the business, as the platforms evolve and games evolve and get more complicated. But I think that people's expectations or benchmarks for quality for PlayStation 3 are going to be higher, because they'll be much more visually and sound-savvy because of the system's functionality for photos, video, music, browsing, etc, and I think that that will lift the bar. Films don't vary in framerate, so why should games?

**Is the PS3 development learning curve really as steep as has been suggested?**

No, it's not. One of the challenges on PlayStation 2, which we're quite comfortable acknowledging, is that the VU0 and VU1 coprocessors, the microprocessors on the Emotion Engine, were difficult to program, because the language required was very specific and very specialist; the knowledge required to get the most out of them was highly evolved. The SPUs [on Cell] are very general purpose in their language; you can program them in C; you don't need to have guru programmers actually implementing techniques

## "A competitor said 1080p support would be impossible at launch. He was mistaken"

addressable market that that would represent; however, we cannot, today, produce a game that supports only 1080p. And it should be made abundantly clear, in case anybody's confused on this, that of course when a game supports 1080p that doesn't sacrifice the other formats – 720p, 1080i, 480p and SD resolutions.

**Do you think Xbox 360 focusing on 720 and PS3 having more 1080 support is going to be an issue for the development community when creating dual-format games?**

No. I think it's a factor which will differentiate PlayStation 3 more and more over time as developers get comfortable with the tools and the technology. The benefit to all games is that when you run at 1080p you have to run at 60 frames per second, so when you're running at 720p you're also running at 60 frames per second. So the waterfall of quality goes through all the screen displays, and that is a real consumer benefit. So even though you may not have a 1080p panel you know that that game, generally, is going to be a better experience for your display.

**To Edge readers, of course, refreshing at 60 frames per second is important, but what about the bigger picture? There's a wider audience out there to whom much lower framerates are just the way things are. They don't perceive it as a deficiency.**

on them – the only challenge is an architectural one, which is understanding that the PPU on the Cell is really only there for management and delegation purposes, and that the heavy lifting should be done by the SPUs. And developers naturally have focused on the PPU to begin with and then slowly moved their systems across to SPUs. The only challenge is architectural, when you're designing your game technology.

**Moving on to PS3 online gaming, there's still some confusion over Sony's specific approach to things like Xbox 360-style achievements.**

At the moment we have very sophisticated support for achievements, community, clans, etc, which is integrated within a game – *Resistance* has market-leading features in that regard, and we think that's important for a certain category of games and for a certain category of users. Obviously PlayStation 3 by definition will have a
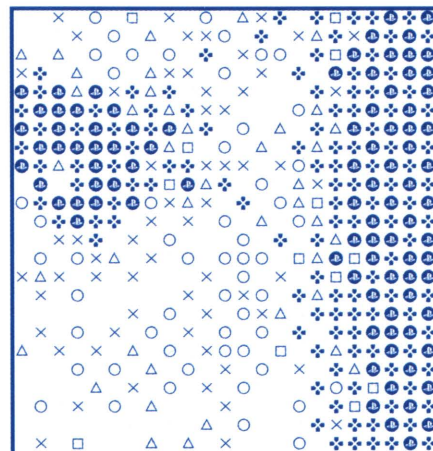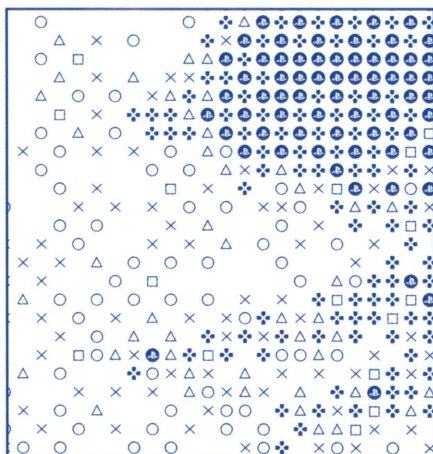
wide userbase, and I don't think that every user is going to want to or even know about the implications of that. A game like *Blast Factor* has a very simple global ranking system to it, which I think is important – you play the game, register your high score, see how far you are progressing up the leaderboard – but we will do some things that tie certain features of certain games together into a common space.

**What about micropayments? The concept of having to buy additional content rather than having it from the first purchase isn't universally popular. What's your take on it?**
I think what all of these arguments have glossed over is perhaps an incorrect assumption as to what the price is of that disc is in the first place.

the music industry they will tell you that there is very little justification for all songs being the same price on iTunes, and I have sympathy with that, and I think the same will and should apply to game experiences. If I'm buying and downloading a pack of content that extends my play experience by many hours with new stories, new maps, new characters, new worlds to discover, etc, then I should be paying reasonable money for that, whereas if I'm adding a tattoo to the leg of my fighter to personalise my character I might not value that so highly, and that's the benefit of the microtransaction system that we've put in place with the Wallet: you can have a transaction which is as much as a full-price game is at retail or you can have a transaction which is as small as a few pence, and everything in between.

It is the economic foundation on which the future growth of our industry will be built, so it's very difficult, where we are sat today, to make any broad generalisations about all horse armour has to be 25p, or all rally cars have to be a fiver. And don't read anything into those prices, by the way.

**It seems that we're heading towards a future in which there are fewer and fewer format exclusives, and perhaps exclusives will be in the form of specific downloadable content, such as with *Grand Theft Auto IV*, whose 360 version will have episodes not available in the PS3 version.**

# "Apparently, our internal resource is bigger than Nintendo's and Microsoft's combined"

So without going into specific game examples, because I don't want to talk about any particular business model, if the cost of entry for that game is significantly lowered and additional content can be purchased where part of the content is downloaded from a network and part of the content resides on the disc, personally I see nothing wrong with that because I think that is a positive way of expanding the consumer experience. And I think that most of the content is going to be downloaded from a server rather than unlocked from the original disc.

**It's easy to see how something like *Singstar* could work with micropayments because people have become used to buying single songs as mp3s for a set amount of money. There's a problem with gaming in that no one knows how much, say, a set of horse armour should cost. Do we need to reach a point where downloadable game content settles at a certain price, so that gamers begin to understand a general cost of, say, a new car for a racing game, and so on?**
Well, let's keep it abstract. If you talk to people in

I think the reason why this debate is so upfront at the moment is because we are coming to the marketplace second, and there are publishers who have made an investment in next-generation technology and particular brands, and they're looking to amortise that investment. And I completely understand that, I have no problem with that at all, but once our addressable installed base grows I think the economic incentive for
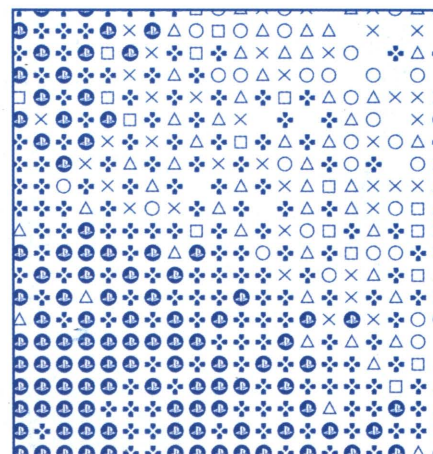
publishers and developers to write to the specific features and advantages of PlayStation 3 becomes much more obvious, and I think it'll become self-determining in that regard.

On top of which, you're asking the wrong person because I'm the head of Worldwide Studios, not the head of thirdparty any more. From an internal development resource point of view, Worldwide Studios has a very large resource dedicated to the PlayStation format. According to a Screen Digest report our internal resource is bigger than Nintendo's and Microsoft's combined, so that gives us a pretty powerful differentiating factor, because clearly our development resource and the huge network of external developers that we work with – companies like Evolution and Insomniac are not included in that analysis – are all working exclusively on PlayStation 3; they're all working on technology which we share, which is pushing the differentiating factors of PlayStation 3 and network and Sixaxis controller and hard disc drive and resolution and so on.

**As far as episodic gaming goes, how much of a problem is it creating for developers? Because it's some contrast between finishing a game and moving on to the next project, and not actually finishing a game at all.**
You are absolutely right and you've hit upon the kind of topic du jour within game development at the moment: the impact that it has organisationally, managerially – the way you're changing the nature of game development is
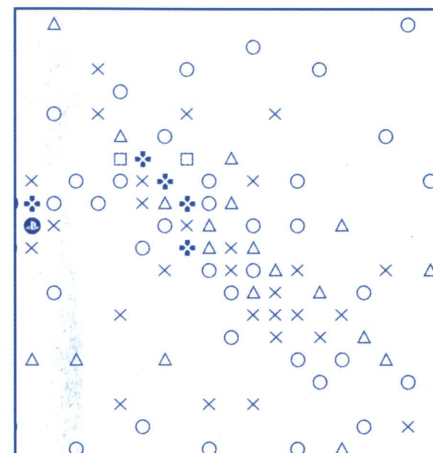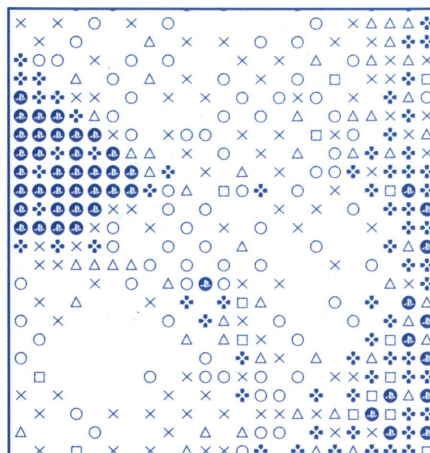
fundamental. In fact for the last 25 years we've had a very similar development phase, which is design, production, testing, then finish, and when you finish you ship the game. And we have this expression about 'shipping' a title because it's trucks rolling out of a warehouse or planes full of discs or whatever going to various locations, and at that point you wave goodbye to the product and by and large that's the end of your relationship not only with the product but with the consumer, too. What we have with PlayStation 3 and network-driven economies generally is when you launch the game you're *starting* a service, you're *starting* a relationship with the consumer, and I've been saying to our teams that they have got to change their mentality to think about what it's like to run a business that might last for five years, ten years, and the impact that that has organisationally is quite interesting.

have a production-orientated group which is working on expanding the experience that is designed and defined on the existing technology platform, and then you leapfrog and flip-flop as time goes on. And that's what we're putting in place now. In some ways it's borrowing from other industries – it's a production methodology which is quite well understood in television and in production of linear episodic content.

## "I've been looking at products and services that will change your perceptions of gaming"

**That change is going to be really difficult, isn't it?**

No, no, no, it's positive. Within that context of the change you will have your pioneering team of innovators, of technologists and of creators perhaps roll off the project and on to defining the technology platform for the major upgrade that's going to happen 18 months later, whereas you

**Are you finding it easier to attract publisher support to PS3 than was the case with PS2?**

As it relates to industry support, we've shipped 10,000 development systems for PlayStation 3, which is 50 per cent more than we did for PlayStation 2 and PlayStation 1 at a comparable time. The industry support is ubiquitous. I can't think of anybody who is not developing for PlayStation 3 right now, with strategic-level support on their titles.

**Talking about shipping SDKs, what happened with *Tony Hawk's Project 8*, which features online support on 360 but not on PS3?**

I can't comment on the decisions that Activision have made. I don't know why they decided to do that. I can only assume it was a production issue. But it's not for me to comment on.

**Wrapping up, then, what do you think PlayStation 3's legacy will be?**

That's a great question. [Thinks] If PlayStation 1's legacy was to legitimise gaming as an entertainment form, and PlayStation 2 legitimised entertainment and gaming by taking it out of the bedroom and into the living room, PlayStation 3's legacy will be combining entertainment and the network in the living room.
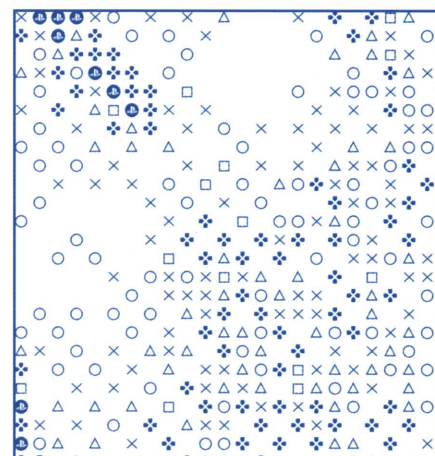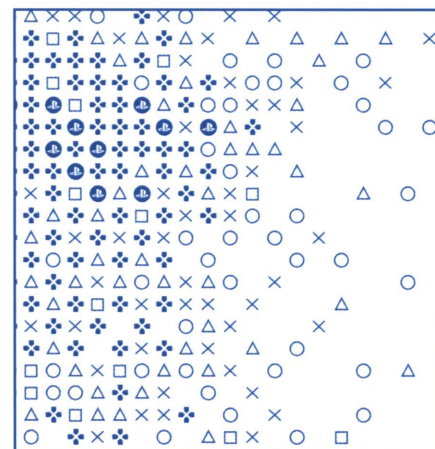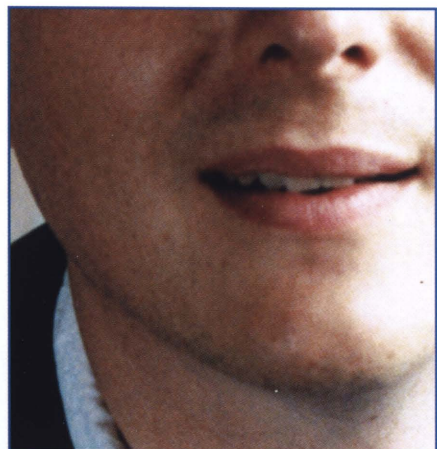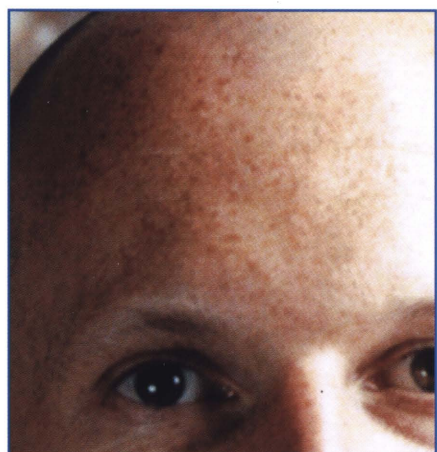
**What sort of shape do you think Sony as a whole is in right now, at PS3's launch?**

Tired. [Laughs] You know I can't speak for the guys in Japan who I know are working really hard to get everything done, but production hardware issues aside – and those are very short-term road bumps that are being addressed – PlayStation 3 is in a pretty good place right now. Since TGS I've met with all of our studios worldwide bar one, and I've been getting a sense of not only launch games that are finished, but second-wave games emerging and delivering phenomenal… I don't want to say improvement because that implies that the first games aren't good enough, but progression. I've been looking at two or three products and services that I think will make you change your perceptions of what a videogame machine can be. And I mean you in particular, and your colleagues in the industry.

**Presumably [Sony chief] Howard Stringer is expecting big things from PS3.**

Yes. For not entirely the right reasons Sony's been in the headlines a lot recently, and for me PlayStation 3 has kind of come into complete focus in the last two weeks now that I've got final machines and final OS and final games, and I think we are going to have a very, very successful launch in the next 120 days, in terms of launch and thereafter into production ramp-up into Europe. Then it's onwards and upwards.